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Model Policy for the Appropriate Use of Telehealth Technologies in the Practice of Veterinary Medicine

Introduction

When telehealth is used within the confines of state and provincial regulations, it provides valuable tools to augment the delivery and availability of high quality veterinary care. According to the Center for Connected Health Policy, "Telehealth encompasses a broad variety of technologies and tactics to deliver virtual medical, health, and education services. Telehealth is not a specific service, but a collection of means to enhance care and education delivery" (according to The Center for Connected Health Policy www.cchpca.org). Advancements in communication and information technology provide opportunities for new approaches to the delivery of veterinary medicine.

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Definitions

Animal means any member of the Animal kingdom other than humans, whether living or dead.

Client means an entity, Person, group or corporation that has entered into an agreement with a Veterinarian for the purposes of obtaining veterinary medical services.

Consultation means when a Veterinarian receives advice or assistance in Person, telephonically, electronically, or by any other method of communication, from a veterinarian or other Person whose expertise, in the opinion of the Veterinarian, would benefit an Animal. Under any circumstance, the responsibility for the welfare of the Animal remains with the Veterinarian receiving Consultation.

Informed Consent means the Veterinarian has informed the Client or the Client's authorized representative, in a manner understood by the Client or representative, of the diagnostic and treatment options, risk assessment, prognosis, and the Client has consented to the recommended treatment.

Non-medical Advice means any advice given by a Veterinarian via any medium outside an established VCPR that is given in general terms, not specific to an individual animal, group of animals, diagnosis, or treatment.

Patient means any Animal or group of Animals receiving veterinary care from a Veterinarian or Veterinary Technician.

Telehealth is the overarching term that encompasses all uses of technology geared to remotely deliver health information or education.

Telemedicine is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications regarding a Patient's clinical health status.

Teletriage means emergency Animal care, including Animal poison control services, for immediate, potential life-threatening animal health situations (e.g., poison exposure mitigation, animal CPR instructions, and other critical lifesaving advice).

Veterinarian means an individual who is duly licensed to practice veterinary medicine under the provisions of Act _____.

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) exists when both the Veterinarian and Client agree for the Veterinarian to assume responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the Patient (s).

Veterinary Technician means an individual who is duly licensed to practice veterinary technology under the provisions of Act _____.

Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Telehealth Technologies in Veterinary Medical Practice

The [Name of Board] has adopted the following guidelines for Veterinarians and Veterinary Technicians utilizing Telehealth in the delivery of Animal care and medical advice within the constraints of a Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR).

Licensure

A Veterinarian or Veterinary Technician must be licensed, or under the jurisdiction, of the Board of Veterinary Medicine in the state or province where the Patient is located. The practice of veterinary medicine occurs where the Patient(s) or Client is located at the time Telehealth is used. Veterinarians who treat through online service sites are practicing veterinary medicine and must possess appropriate licensure in all jurisdictions where Patients receive care. Should a Veterinary Technician be utilized in the delivery of Animal care, the Veterinarian and

or, hands on medical care, while others are not. The Veterinarian must ensure that he or she safeguards a Client's privacy when practicing via Telehealth by taking appropriate precautions and confirming that the technology and physical setting being used by the Veterinarian and Client have adequate security protocols in place to ensure compliance with the Veterinarian's legal and professional obligations to protect Clients' privacy and confidentiality.

Evidence documenting appropriate consent for the use of Telehealth must be obtained and maintained. The Veterinarian must ensure that the Client is aware of the Veterinarian's identity, location, licensure state or province, number and status, and the privacy and security issues involved in accessing veterinary care via Telehealth.

Continuity of Care

Veterinarians should ensure that Clients can seek, with relative ease, follow-up care or information from the Veterinarian (or Veterinarian's designee) who conducts an encounter using Telehealth. Veterinarians solely providing services using Telehealth with no existing VCPR prior to the encounter must maintain appropriate medical records that contain sufficient information for another veterinarian to continue care if necessary, make documentation of the Telehealth encounter easily available to the Client immediately after the encounter, and subject to the Client's consent, including the identity of all care providers of the Patient(s).

Emergency Services

Teletriage may be performed by a Veterinarian or Veterinary Technician without establishing a VCPR to provide emergency, potentially life-saving Telehealth consultations with the public until that Patient can be seen by a veterinarian.

Medical Records

Appropriate medical records must be maintained in a secure and confidential manner. The medical record should include, but not be limited to, if applicable, copies of all patient related electronic communications, including prescriptions, laboratory and test results, imaging, evaluations and consultations, and instructions obtained or produced in connection with the utilization of Telehealth. Informed Consents obtained in connection with an encounter involving Telehealth should also be filed in the medical record.

Prescribing Medications

In order to prescribe medication when practicing via Telehealth, the Veterinarian must have sufficient knowledge of the animal or group of animals by virtue of a history and inquiry and either physical examination or medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal or group of animals is kept. Prescribing medications, in-person or via Telehealth, is at the professional discretion of the veterinarian. The indication, appropriateness, and safety considerations for each Telehealth visit prescription must be evaluated by the veterinarian in accordance with current laws and standards of care and consequently carry the same professional accountability as prescriptions delivered during an encounter in person.

Disclosures and Functionality on Online Services Making Available Telehealth Technologies

Online services must clearly identify the licensure state or province, number and status of all Veterinarians or Veterinary Technicians providing veterinary medical services using Telehealth and should provide Clients a clear mechanism to:

1. Access, supplement and amend Client provided contact information and health information about the Animal;
2. Provide feedback regarding the site and the quality of information and services; and;
3. Register complaints, including information regarding filing a complaint with the applicable Board of Veterinary Medicine.

Non-medical Advice may be provided without establishing a VCPR; however, it must meet the disclosure and functionality requirements of this section.

Online services must have accurate and transparent information about the website owner/operator, location, and contact information, including domain name that accurately reflects the identity.

Advertising or promotion of goods or products from which the Veterinarian receives direct remuneration, benefits, or incentives (other than fees for the medical care services) is prohibited. Notwithstanding, online services may provide links to general health information sites to enhance Client education; however, the Veterinarian should not benefit financially from providing such links or from the services or products marketed by such links. When providing links to other sites, Veterinarians should be aware of the implied endorsement of the information, services or products offered from such sites. The maintenance of preferred relationships with any pharmacy is prohibited. Veterinarians shall not transmit prescriptions to a specific pharmacy, or recommend a pharmacy, in exchange for any type of consideration or benefit from that pharmacy.

Provide Feedback

This survey can only be completed once.